

From: Molly Shaw [<mailto:██████@tnva.org>]

Sent: Thursday, December 13, 2012 7:27 PM

Cc: 'Josh Williams'; Branch, Alison; ██████@tnva.org

Subject: IMPORTANT: TIME SENSITIVE for Tuesday at 10:00am

Importance: High

Dear Middle School Teachers,

I know that you've worked extremely hard this year to offer excellent education to our students. There is no doubt that you have bent over backwards a multitude of times for our kids. I need to ask you to do something very important before Tuesday, December 18th by 10:00am. I apologize to be asking this late, but after perusing Engrade and looking at so many failing grades, we need to make some changes before the holidays.

After our admin/lead Middle School meeting today, we have decided to make a change concerning OLS Progress in Engrade. Up until now, OLS progress has been cumulative so if a student struggled at the beginning of the year, and is now caught up, that lower progress initially will affect the grade. Please see snapshot here:

Assignments for you Before Tuesday by 10:00am. This cannot be late!

- Each content 7th/8th grade teacher, or 6th grade homeroom teacher, needs to take out the October and September progress; delete it so that all is showing is November Progress.

- We expect you teachers to use your teacher discretion on the averaging of Unit Assessments. If you know that your student has been earnest in their lessons, but the

averaging of unit assessment has given the student an F, please consider counting the final grade to be used in Engrade. Ex: Student makes a 75, then make a 90. The average would be 82 (C) or accepting the 90 a B. You teachers hear from your students, you know them, use your professional discretion to determine what is fair.

- If you have given an assignment and most of your students failed that assignment, then you need to take that grade out of your Engrade.

- We will try to create some time on Monday where you'll have time to do this.

- Please clean up Engrade. If you have students that have been withdrawn in your homeroom, please make sure you POD knows and they can be taken out of Engrade.
- EE teachers, we are working with Stephanie Young to come up with a plan for the students that you are 100% covering in either ELA or MA, but we can wait until January 2nd for that plan to be announced to you—General Ed teachers, if you are not teaching students in Math and or ELA, then I should not be receiving those names on the list specified below.
- **If you want to get together with your POD and determine an earlier time to complete this project, that is fine!**

6th Grade Homeroom Teachers:

- Create a MATH and ELA spreadsheet from the OLS that includes student name, learning coach, email addresses.
- Send to Molly, Tuesday at 10:00am, only the students that still have F's in Engrade on those two list.

7th and 8th Grade Content Teachers:

- Create a Math or ELA spreadsheet from the OLS that includes student name, learning coach, email addresses.
- Send to Molly, Tuesday at 10:00am, only the students that still have F's in Engrade.

Molly will be sending out the admin letter below Tuesday afternoon. It will include directions to Engrade and be sent both in **Kmail and Email** to all student families that have F's in subjects of ELA and Math. This is not to say that the F's in history and science are not important, but we are concentrating in ELA/MA for now.

Dear Parents,

As the administrative leaders for our TNVA Middle School, we am very concerned about your student's grades in ELA and Math for this first semester. Mid Year Progress Reports are distributed January 8th, 2013. Your teachers have made every effort to offer class instruction both in Class Connect sessions, small groups and tutoring sessions, so that your student may succeed at TNVA. Study Island assignments have been given as part of their grade as well. In early December, all teachers gave their students an opportunity to improve their grades by giving additional assignments. Yet, we are still seeing failing grades in Engrade.

As Learning Coaches with the responsibility of overseeing your students' education, please consider having your students work within the On Line School during the Winter Break. If any students are taking Unit Assessments during the break, be sure your students **study first**. Each student's attempts at taking Unit Assessments are *averaged* as one grade.

Also, make sure that your student is only working within the Student Account. We want all our students at TNVA to succeed. Let's work together.

Wishing your family the very best during the holidays,

Josh Williams & Molly Shaw & Alison Branch

Lastly teachers, when we return on January 2nd, you'll be putting in the Progress in Engrade for first semester. We want to give the students a chance (especially those with failing grades) ample opportunity to bring those grades up by the end of 1st semester.

Thank you for your work here and again I'm so sorry to spring this on you late,
Molly

Molly Shaw

M. Ed & Principal Endorsement
TNVA Academic Administrator 6-8

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office
fax
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Phil Williams <pwilliams@jrn.com>

Response to query

1 message

Josh Williams <jwilliams@tnva.org>

Fri, Feb 8, 2013 at 12:40 PM

To: pwilliams@newschannel5.com

Phil,

I understand you're finishing your story and I'm sorry I cannot be available for an interview. We've been very busy with state testing. I'm aware of the email you have from our academic administrator and your interest in our school's internal grading procedures, so I wanted to send along a detailed explanation for you.

Our goal as educators is to advance student learning by finding the best ways to measure individual student progress, identify gaps, and provide remediation, enrichment, and academic support to meet the individual needs of all students.

In schools all across Tennessee, principals, academic leaders, and teachers develop their own internal grading procedures and policies. They can vary by school, course and class. In this case, our decision to adjust areas in our grading procedures was made carefully, thoughtfully and with the best interest of our students in mind. It did not impact the integrity of our school's grading system and has no relationship to state tests. TNVA students earn the grades they receive.

Josh Williams

Head of School

Tennessee Virtual Academy (A school of Union County School District)

Additional Background:

In December 2012, our school's academic team decided to make some adjustments to the grading procedures for our middle school students. Our academic team believed this would align well with TNVA's mastery-based learning model, improve the measurement of individual student progress, and enable the school to better identify students most in need of intervention and remediation. The decision was approved by me, TNVA's Head of School, and then it was communicated to teachers by the school's academic administrator.

The adjustment involved two of the six features that compose students' midyear grade: grades for progress in the curriculum and unit course assessment grades.

Progress Grades: Rather than averaging the progress scores for each month, we adjusted the grading procedure to recognize students' most recent progress score. Online schools allow students the flexibility to learn at their own pace in a highly individualized learning model. Some students start and end strong, showing high engagement and consistent achievement. Other students may struggle in the beginning but "catch up" over time and demonstrate progress. Some may struggle throughout and show a regular pattern of low engagement. By going back

into our school's electronic grading system and recording students' most recent progress score (instead of taking the average throughout the semester) we could more accurately recognize students' current progress in their individualized learning program. This also helped differentiate those and identify those who needed instructional intervention and remediation.

Unit Course Assessment Grades: TNVA's curriculum uses assessments as a tool to help students achieve mastery of the content. Students that do not score well on an initial unit assessment are encouraged to review the material and retake the assessment before moving on to new content. Students who make the effort to review the unit material and retake the assessment can earn a higher grade. This is a common practice in traditional schools as well (e.g. make-up tests, alternative assessments, extra credit opportunities). The learning management system allows teachers to track student engagement and see how well their students are mastering the content as they move through the curriculum.